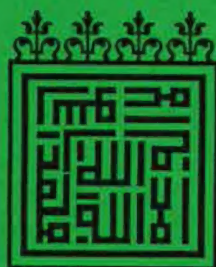


some thoughts
on
the possiblity
of
perfection



‘Abdullāh Noorudeen Durkee
Green Mountain, Virginia



27 Dhu-l-Hijjah 1415 Hijri
27 May 1995 Miladi

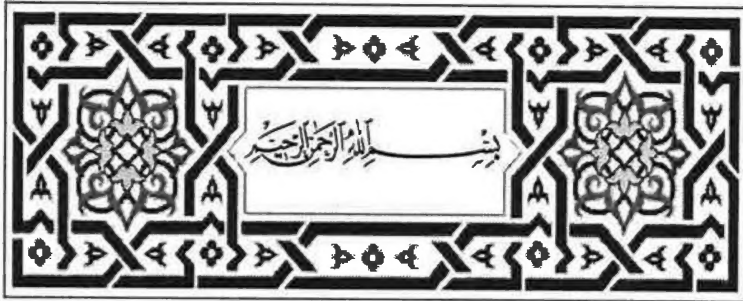
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some thoughts on the possiblity of perfection

Praise be to Allāh, Lord of all the worlds who, through His Eternal Word, does not cease to be praised: The Compassionate, The Mercy Full, Who by His Mercy has stirred up within us gratitude for His goodness wherewith He has enriched us and inspired us to praise and glorify Him.

The limits of favour and the bounds of praise were extended when He promised to those grateful for His bounty still more blessings; and He spread wide the carpet of His Assembly to those who remember Him. He has brought into subjection all things according to His Wisdom and Equity, as He has willed, by His Power, so that by His Authority the mover remains still and the still moves. *'He is the First and the Last, The Outer and the Inner,'* {57:3} the Controller of expansion {*baṣṭ*} and contraction {*qabd*}, *'the Knower of the Unseen {al-ghayb}; not even the weight of an atom, or less than that or greater than that, either in the heavens or on the earth escapes Him.'* {34:3}

We praise Him with the praise of those who know Him with true knowledge of Him. We give thanks to Him with the expressions of gratitude of those who acknowledge the perfection of His goodness and favour. We bear witness that there is no deity other than Allāh alone, having no companion, with an affirmation to which no doubt is attached and before which no door closes from accepting. We testify that in speaking of human perfection that we speak first of our liege-lord Muḥammad, the Perfect Worshipper {*ʿabdu-l-llāh*}, His Slave and Prophet and Messenger chosen from the mine of pure nobility, selected from a family of honour whose virtues speech falls short of describing. Allāh bless and save him, with a blessing that will bring us to him and gather us around him on the Day of Assembly and Reckoning. May Allāh be pleased with his family, his helpers, his descendants, the people of his household, his illustrious companions, the best of friends, as long as a star will shine, the full moon shall rise and a cloud shall float above the face of the earth.

I believe it to be only fair to a reader that I identify myself, since I know that other than Muslims will most likely be reading this article, which is specifically being written for an interfaith council. I am, *inshallāh*, a practicing Muslim, devoted reader of the Qurʾān and a lover of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, the final messenger who proclaimed the original ancient way and called all human beings in all times and every world to the remembrance and worship of the One Being, Allāh *subhanhu wa taʿālā*. I am writing this after, *alḥamdulillāh*, praying the tarawih prayers, from my desk in an old, very relatively speaking, country farmhouse on the side of Green Mountain in the Commonwealth of Virginia at the time of the full moon of Ramaḍān.

At this time throughout the Muslim 'world' bodies, hearts, minds and spirits are especially turned to the worship of Allāh and manifestations of the love of His Messenger, blessings and peace be upon him, the brother of all the other prophets, and I make no distinction between any of them and ask for them as I ask for him, the blessings and peace of Allāh upon all of those known and unknown who proceeded him in proclaiming the same original and ancient way. Peace and blessings be upon all who continue, in the face of great odds, to continue to proclaim and seek to live and practice in their most every day lives that same ancient and original way.

In this time of fasting we are, *ʿinshallāh*, ever more resolutely seeking to perfect our worship, deepen our prayers and, through cadenced recitation {*tajwīd*} of Qurʾān al-Karīm in Arabic, the living Semitic tongue in which was delivered. We hope through this to better understand the living word of Allāh and, *inshallāh*, we hope to perceive the Presence {*ḥadrah*} of the Messenger, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him who first spoke the Message he received from the Angel Jibrīl {Gabriel}, peace be upon him, as he heard it from Allāh without changing it in any way.

In our fasting we have sought to see how this subject of perfection can be addressed. I hope the reader understands that I am writing this only because it has been specifically requested that I write about the subject of perfection. For myself I am, *inshallāh*, a humble man, husband of wives, father of children and grandchildren, and have no claim to any kind of perfection save that which Allāh has bestowed upon me as He has, in Reality, bestowed upon all beings.

Having said that, I can also say that just, as when I walk in the fields at night around my home and gaze out across the blazing sharp glints of the star-studded depths of the winter sky, flooded now by the full moon, my eye can hold the depths of that universe, so can my mind, which is my heart, hold the 'idea' of perfection.

And that perfection is, was, and always will be, Allāh.

If I seek perfection in *form* I must find it in the form of the Messenger. He is al-ʿ*insānu-l-kāmil*!

A Muslim believes that perfection, so far as it can be said to have manifested in a finite and limited form and for that reason always understood to be relative to true perfection which can only be and remain the domain of Allāh, may His Name be Praised, can only be found in the form of the Prophet who was the Seal of all the Prophets and the narrator, for he was unlettered, of the Oral Transmission of the Final Testament, the Generous Reading {Qurʾān al-Karīm}, which has been and is at this very moment being delivered to every soul who has ears to hear.

It is first heard in a cave on the Mountain of Light {jabalu-n-nūr} in the desert outside the ancient shrine city of Makkah by a man purifying himself by fasting outside his native city inhabited at that time almost solely by cult worshippers of some 360 separate 'gods' and the shrine servants {khādim}. There were probably a few unchurched Christians, Ethiopians or Nestorians, and possibly renegades or dissenters from the 'official' churches of Byzantium and Rome and, no doubt, Jews, oasis farmers or more likely, traders passing along the ancient north south incense and trade route from times far older yet. There were also some old believers who were called Ḥanīf, the pure ones who remained true to the Way brought by ʾIbrāhīm and ʾIsmaʿīl {Abraham and Ishmael}, peace be upon them, who had raised up many centuries earlier a simple square stone building in the centre of town as a place to worship Allāh, the Lord of all the worlds.

In the course of those 2450± years that building, originally intended for the worship of Allāh had gradually become a home to idols of every degree which completed the circle. They were 360 'objects' of veneration and, inevitably, magic. Long distance trade ruled the town and the many shrines of the cults and gods were good for business bringing travellers from near and far resulting in an ever more wide spread business each with its cults and wierding ways.

There were also those, as in every age, who heard another call. This man sitting in the cave was a married man and father, an orphan but also a relative of the wealthy and paramount tribe of the city. He was a retired long distance trader who was much loved by his people who called him Amin, the Honest One, and was often asked to help solve vexing town problems. He was forty years old.

Through the spangled nights and burning days he sat fasting in the cave outside his city; sunk in the worship the Holy Only One. His sole nourishment was dates and water taken after sunset.

He had been sitting for almost a whole month. It was, he later reckoned, but never made exactly clear, an odd numbered night towards the end of the lunar cycle.

It was there, at that time in his life, that he was visited by an angel — the Angel Jibrīl, may peace be upon him, or Gabriel as he is known in English. It was this mighty archangel who transmitted to him the Message from Allāh which we now know as al-Qurʾān, the Recital.

This, however, was not the first visit he had received from an angel. In fact he had been visited by angels very early on in his life and it is this story that I must first recount if we are to understand and open out the meaning of perfection as understood by Muslims.

When the Prophet, the chosen one {*al-mustafah*}, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, was but a few weeks old and an orphan due to the death of his father ‘Abdullāh, the wet-nurses of Bani Saad came to Makkah searching for infants to nurse as was the custom. In the course of their seeking they overlooked the orphan in favour of richer pickings. There was one wet-nurse, Halimah bint Abu Zuayb, however, who was not particularly robust and thus had not found a baby to nurse. So it is that there was an orphan without a wet nurse and a wet nurse without one to nurse.

It seems they were destined for each other and when she announced to her husband her intention to take the orphan he said, “Do what you must. Perhaps Allāh shall bless us with his presence.” This was indeed the case, for when the orphan came to their black tent in the deep desert their sheep grew fat and increased in milk as did Halimah. Allāh blessed them in everything.

When two years had passed Halimah brought her charge back to Makkah and his mother Aminah.

When his mother saw how well her son had done — how big and healthy he had become — how clear and strong he was — how his tongue had begun to shape itself to the pure Arabic of the pastoral nomads, Aminah asked Halimah to take him back to the desert for another two years where he remained free from the decadent life, moral and physical, of the shrine city.

It was in during the period of these latter two years that he was first visited by the angels. This is, in a story form, how he later told the happenings of that day to Halimah:

“There came to see me three. One of them had a silver pitcher in one hand and, in the other, a green emerald bowl which was filled with snow. They took me and rushed with me to the top of the mountain.

On the top of the mountain they laid me down and the first angel took a knife and split my chest down to my stomach. Neither did I feel anything nor was it painful. Then he put his hand into the hollow of my abdomen and took out my organs and washed them with the snow, cleaning them very carefully. Then he put them back.

Now the second angel rose and bade the first to leave saying, “Go! You have done what Allāh has ordered.” Then the second angel approached me and put his hand deep into my chest and drew out my heart, split it in twain and took out of it a black thing filled with blood and threw it away saying, “That is the part of Shaytān within you oh beloved of Allāh,” and then he put my heart back in its place and sealed it with a seal of light and I still feel the coolness of that seal in my veins and joints.

Then the third one arose and ordered the second away saying that he had done what Allāh had ordered. He then passed his hand over me and closed the opening in my chest. He then helped me to descend and bowed before me and then kissed me on my forehead, saying.,

“Oh beloved of Allāh. You will never fear and if you but knew the good that has been prepared for you, you would be most happy.”

And then he left me to sit upon my place and then all three of them set off to fly away and entered the skies as I watched and if you want I will show you where they have gone.”

In the beginning of the Chapter {sūrah} of Solace {aṣḥ-ṣḥarḥ} we can perhaps see the traces {aṭḥar} of this story in the question of Allāh to the Prophet, blessings and peace be upon him,

أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ
وَوَضَعْنَا عَنْكَ وِزْرَكَ

ALAM NASHṢRAḤ LAKA ṢADĀRAK
WA WADA‘NĀ ‘ANKA WIZRAK

Have we not opened your chest
and eased you of your burden?
{94:1-2}

This story of the cleansing of the heart of the Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him and his family, sets out the details of the physical cleansing whereby he entered, in the temporal domain, that immaculate station which he shares with all the prophets, peace be upon them, known as *ma‘ṣūm*, which means that he was physically rendered free from sin and error.

His soul {ar-rūḥ} and individuated being {an-nafs} were both, of course, pure as are indeed are the souls of all beings born into this world.

The difference in the case of the prophets and messengers, peace be upon them, is that they constantly dwell in this immaculate state whereas the rest of us, for one reason or another, at one time or another, are prone to states of forgetfulness {ghaflah}, rebellion {maṣiyah} and error {dhamb}, which obscure our original purity, darken our ‘hearts’ and cause us to be removed from the effortless effulgent light and endless overflowing grace of Allāh.

I have related this story here, not as a digression, but to augment the understanding of the non-Muslim reader who may not be aware of this dimension of Islamic belief {*aqidah*} since, at least in the textually corrupted present day Torah, the prophets and messengers, peace be upon them all, are in certain cases {Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon et. al} portrayed as impure and inclined to sin. It is very important to understand that in the eyes of Muslims all the prophets are immaculate and thus already perfected in a way that we, no matter how pious or righteous we may be, can never be.

To return then to the cave.

When the Angel Jibril, may peace be upon him, came to the fasting man sitting in the cave he came to a man who had undergone a very deep level of purification and had been rigorously prepared, in ways we can barely imagine, to receive the Message of Allāh.

The Message began with the exhortation by Jibril, peace be upon him, that the Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, "Read", or perhaps to render it more clearly in English, "Recite".

He protested that he could not read since he was unlettered {*ummi*}. Whereupon the Angel ordered him again to "Read" and yet again he protested and yet again did the Angel exhort him and again he protested his inability to "Read" whereupon the Angel grabbed and hugged the Prophet, peace be upon the both of them, to his chest and in this way communicated heart to heart the meaning of the beginning of the Revelation which is the Last Testament of Allah to humanity which we call al-Qur'ān which simply means the Reading or the Recital.

When after his wife asked him, he, peace and blessings be upon him, who was unlettered, how he was able to read, he replied, "It was as though the words were written in light upon my heart."

This Revelation was not a one-time Revelation but one which continued over a period of twenty-three years. The first word of this Revelation was the order to "Read" {Q96:1} and the final words were, "This day I have perfected your religion and completed my favour upon you and have chosen for you the religion of 'Islam.'" {Q3:3}

Allāh has made clear to us in many verses that He is neither capricious, nor does He do or say anything without it having a meaning for us. So we must understand that both the beginning and the end of this Final Revelation to humanity are Wisdom {*hikmah*}. Again if we look at the Revelation in terms of its arrangement {*tartib*} in space rather than in time {*nuzūl*} we find that the Revelation begins with the word *bismillāh*, which means In the Name of Allāh, and ends with *an-nās*, which means 'the people'. Thus in space it is a message from Allah to people which begins in time with an order to "Read" and ends in the perfection which is "'Islām".

Now if the state of immaculate perfection {maʿṣūm} enjoyed by the Prophet and all of his brother Prophets, peace and blessings be upon them all, is not a station which we people can ever hope to attain, yet there remains a form of perfection {kāmil} or completion which it is possible for us to both struggle or do combat {jihād} for and, by the Grace of Allāh, hope {rajāʾ} to attain.

The Providential means whereby we can attain to this degree of perfection is vouchsafed to us in two forms.

The first of these forms is to be found in the Message sent to us by Allāh in al-Qurʾān and the second is to be found in the Way of Life {as-sunnah} of the Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him.

When Allāh says, {the meaning of the word in English being} “This day I have perfected your religion and completed my favour upon you and have chosen for you the religion of ʿIslām,” {Q5:3} the word for religion used is *dīnā*.

The root of this word is *danā* which means ‘he borrowed’ or ‘indebted’.

Whereas the word English religion is derived from the Latin *religio*, meaning to tie or bind, and carries the sense of that which ties humans to God and God to humans, the sense and flavour of the word *dīn* {pronounced: *deen*} and its root in *danā* is very different and it is key to understanding how we, as Muslims, understand our *dīn* or our transactional {muʿālamāt} relations with Allāh.

By *debt* we understand that our life is something borrowed. Strictly speaking it does not really belong to us but rather it is bestowed upon us by Allāh as a loan and like a loan it must be paid back. The pay back in this case is the way or manner in which we live our various lives.

Moreover Allāh in a most merciful manner makes clear to us both through the Revelation and the Sunnah or Way of the Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, just how this debt is to be repaid or how that which we have ‘borrowed’ is to be returned — temporally as well as ultimately.

Obviously in the few pages allotted to me in this paper it is quite impossible to open this out in fullness. There is room enough only to provide the reader with the most basic skeleton upon which we Muslims flesh out our lives in an attempt to ‘repay the loan’ in good faith.

These are sometimes called the pillars or cornerstones {al-ʿarkan} of Islam and, depending upon one’s school (madhhab), they are accounted to be either five or seven. In order to be inclusive I will name all seven of these pillars or cornerstones and try to provide the reader with some idea of their utility as practices which humans can employ as a means of reaching a state of relative perfection.

The very first of these pillars, or perhaps we might call them basic steps on the way to a state of possible perfection, is that of purity or *ṭaharah* as it is called in Arabic.

Purity is but a single dimension of a much more complete concept in Arabic. If we speak in the most outer form of a man it means that he is circumcised. In the same manner if we speak of a woman we mean that she is not menstruating. If we speak of men and women we speak of chastity. If we speak of the best people in the community we speak of them in terms of saintliness, holiness and sanctity. If we speak of the generality of children we speak of innocence. And, importantly, if we speak of an action we speak of the physical, as well as spiritual, cleansing of the self and ablution of the body. In all these cases we may use one of the forms of the trilateral root *ṭḥṭ*.

For all Muslims this state of purity, cleanliness, innocence, sanctity and purification of being is a necessary prerequisite of every ritual or sacred act.

Those who cite the hadith that Islam is based on five things start with the witnessing (*shahadah*) but all Muslims agree that one of the conditions of formally enunciating the *shahadah* is the state of ritual purity (*ṭahara*). Everyone agrees that it is a necessary prerequisite (*wajibāt*) of that formal annunciation. Thus we can say that there is no true *shahadah*, no testimony, no witnessing, without prior purification. So we can say that whilst there appears to be a difference yet both parties agree upon the necessity of, at the very least, external purity as a prerequisite for the *shahadah*.

I assume here (due to space limitations) that my reader understands the basics of what is meant then by purity. Certain conditions in the case of women, that they not be menstruating or, in the case of men, that they be circumcised may, for cultural reasons not be immediately clear but at least the general concept of bodily and ritual purity, is not outside the realm of common awareness.

One enters into the state of ritual purity by an ablution of the entire body and all of its orifices with water. If water is not to be found then it suffices that the face and arms be wiped with dust. Obviously purity is more than just a physical thing but the physical is a door to the spiritual. Innocence, holiness and sanctity are internal states understood across most all cultural divides.

The *shahadah* consists of first realising the truth of and then saying with sincere conviction:

أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ

‘ASHHADU ‘AN LĀ ‘ILLĀHA ‘ILLĀ-LLAHU
WA ‘ANNA MUHAMMADU-R-RASŪLU-LLĀH

I bear witness that there is no deity except Allāh and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh

The *shahadah*, or more precisely the *shahadatayn* since it contains two interconnected testimonies or two witnessings, is the outward act by which a person enters into the state of ʿIslām which we understand to be a state of voluntary surrender on the part of the limited self to the unlimited Self. ʿIslām is personally established by this act of external verbal testimony and internal consciousness.

It must be understood that this testimony, this witnessing, is nothing less than the reaffirmation of the original witnessing of all humanity which occurred before time existed when Allāh gathered every soul that would ever be and asked, “Am I not your Lord?” and all of the souls declared, “Obviously! We testify (or we bear witness this is so),” the word in Arabic being *shahidnā*.

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ
وَ أَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا
أَنْ تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ

WA-IDḥ ʾAKḥADḥA RABBUKA MIM BANĪ ʾĀDAMA MIN ḐḥUHURIHIM ḐḥURRY YATAHUM
WA ʾASHḥADAHUM ʿALĀĀ ʾANFUSIHIM ʾALASTU BI-RABBIKUM QĀLŪ BALĀ SHḥAHIDNĀ
ʾAN TAQŪLŪ YŌWMA-L-QUYĀMATI INNĀ KUNĀ ʿAN HĀḐḥĀ GhĀFILĪN

And remember when your Lord brought forth the Children of Adam from their loins their seed
and made them testify of themselves (saying), “Am I not your Lord?”

They said, “Obviously! We witness it {to be so}.

This lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, “Lo! We were not aware.”

{7:172}

If purity is the prerequisite of witnessing, then witnessing is the prerequisite of faith {ʿimān} and the formal declaration of the voluntary surrender {ʿIslām} of the self to the Only Self that Is.

It is a testimony based on the observation of the body, mind, heart and soul, that there is an Allāh and there exists solely as a result of His Creation, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, Death and the Grave as well of a Day of Resurrection and Judgment and Destiny both good and evil.

By His Angels we mean specifically Jibrīl, Mikʿīl, Israfil, ʿAzraʿīl, Munkar, Nakir, Ridwān and Mālik. We also know that there is not one foot of space in any worlds or dimension which does not contain an angel in prayer, bowing or prostrating. By His Books we mean specifically the Torah revealed to Mūsā {Moses}, The Zabūr revealed to Dawūd {David}, The ʾInjil {Evangel} revealed to ʾĪsā {Jesus} and the Qurʾān revealed to Muḥammad, peace be upon them all, knowing that the scholars hold that there have been at least, and some say more 104 Divinely Revealed Books.

By Prophets or Messengers we mean Adam, Idris, Nūh (Noah), Hud, Salih, Lūṭ (Lot), 'Ibrāhīm {Abraham}, Ismā'īl {Ishmael}, Ishāq {Issac}, Ya'qūb {Jacob}, Yūsuf {Joseph}, Shu'ayb, Hārūn {Aaron}, Mūsā (Moses), Dawūd (David), Sulaymān {Solomon}, Ayyub {Job}, Dhū-l-Kifl {Ezekiel}, Yunus (Jonah), Ilyās {Elias}, al-Yasā' {Elisha}, Zakarriyah {Zacharias}, Yahya (John), 'Isā (Jesus) and Muḥammad. We also know that Allāh has sent a messenger to every nation speaking their native tongue and the learned ones say that there are upwards to 124,000 prophets, blessings of Allah and peace be upon them all, that have been sent to the people.

When we say we believe in a Last, or more correctly, Final ('ākhīrah) Day we mean that there is a Day that comes which is not followed by a night. This Day is the Day of the Resurrection of all souls and the Day of Judgment of all the souls by Allāh who will Judge by weighing the actions of each soul for their good and their bad deeds as a result of which all the souls shall pass over a narrow bridge which spans a Fire and because Allāh is the Just those who have done evil shall suffer the Fire and those who have done good shall taste Fire but pass over it and because Allāh is Generous they shall be rewarded by an eternal life in "Gardens through which rivers flow." {Q2:25}

And when we say belief in destiny (qadr), both its good and its evil, we mean it at the most simple and understandable level where "what hits you was not going to miss you and what misses you was not going to hit you," which is to say that we believe that the real doer of every action is Allāh and that Allāh knows everything before, during and after it is and knows how it is when it happens.

Thus does one attest to one's voluntary surrender and become one of the surrendered ones.

Just as we know this to be true so do we know that there is no belief without action, for Allāh has mentioned in many different places that belief and action are inextricably joined and indissolubly married and that, indeed, one's surrender ('istislām) is perfected through the performance of certain acts which are the ṣalāh or five times daily cycle of worship, the ṣawm or the fasting during the ninth lunar month, the zakāh or the purification of one's wealth by giving in charity a minimum of 2.5% of the excess of one's annual earnings, the ḥajj or the pilgrimage to the original House of Worship in Makkah at least once in one's lifetime if one can find a way, and continual combat or struggle (jihād) against the forces of disbelief and oppression both internal and external.

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ

WA BASHṢHIRI-L-LADHĪNA 'ĀMANŪ WA 'AMILŪ-Ṣ-ṢĀLIḤAT

And give good news to those who believe and perform wholesome acts
{2:25}

I am obliged to mention here that for the purposes of this essay I have chosen only the cornerstones or pillars {arkan} of 'Islām. It should not be thought that they are the whole of 'Islām and that somehow can be isolated from what is the whole body or fabric of 'Islām. In truth they are constituent parts of a whole. As Muslims we are ever reminded by Allāh and by his Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, to seek the middle way between extremes of over-zealous concentration on the prescribed rites and the obligations which are a consequence of our being human and the counter extremes of worldliness and temporality. Consider the following story:

“The Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, made a bond of brotherhood {ākhyi} between Salmān and Abu ad-Dardā’.

Salmān visited ad-Dardā’ and found his wife dressed in shabby clothes and he asked her why she was dressed like that. She said, “Your brother ad-Dardā’ is not interested in the luxuries of this world. In the meantime ad-Dardā’ arrived and prepared a meal for Salmān and when it was complete Salmān asked ad-Dardā’ to eat with him but ad-Dardā’ replied that he was fasting whereupon Salmān said that he would not eat unless ad-Dardā’ ate with him.

Night came and part of it passed when ad-Dardā’ got up {to pray the voluntary middle of the night ṣalāh} but Salmān told him to sleep and ad-Dardā’ slept. After some time ad-Dardā’ got up again and again Salmān told him to sleep. When the last hours of the night were reached then Salmān told him to get up and both of them offered the ṣalāh together.

Salmān told him, “Your Lord has a right{ ḥaqq} on you, your body has a right on you and your family has a right on you; so give each its rights.”

ad-Dardā’ went to the Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, and narrated the whole story and he replied, “Salmān has spoken the truth.” {Abu Juḥayfa narrated it, Bukḥārī transmitted it}

Please try to keep in mind that all of the prescribed rites and rituals fit within the context of one’s life and the life of one’s family. Allāh made clear that monasticism was something invented by people and not something which He prescribed for people. {Q57:27}. In a very important ḥadīth the Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, is reported to have said that marriage is fully one half of the dīn. Thus the arkan are part of the means to perfection but not the sole means.

Since the advent of the last dispensation of 'Islām there have been critics who found fault with this attitude, which they find to be permissive and even licentious. From a Muslim perspective such people, through over concentration on the other world, have lost sight of this world. The Muslim tries to remember that Allāh is the Lord of *all* the Worlds and all realms are part of His Creation.

Having placed these arkān then in context let me review. I have mentioned seven prescribed practices set forth in the Qurʾān and manifest in the comportment (sunnah) of the Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him and his family, which we, as Muslims, believe can, when put in action, raise the believing man or woman to a state of completion or relative perfection keeping in mind that absolute perfection belongs to Allāh alone and that immaculate perfection (maʿṣūm) is a characteristic reserved for prophets, peace be upon them all.

In English these are: Purification, Witnessing, Worship, Fasting, Charity, Pilgrimage and Struggle.

I will, ʿinshāllāh, describe each of these in a very summary fashion¹ and then give a brief idea of how they might aid a Muslim man and woman to possibly reach a state of relative perfection.

- Purification (aṭ-ṭaharah) has two outer forms.

The first is the minor purification (al-wuḍūʿ) which means to wash certain parts of the body with the intention of worship using water not changed by anything. The basis for it is found in the Qurʾān (meaning), “O believers when you go to pray, wash your faces, and wash your forearms to the elbows, wipe your heads and your feet to the ankles.” (Q5:6) and in the saying (ḥadiṭh) of the Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon, related by Muslim, “Worship (ṣalāh) is not accepted without purification.” Four things make the wuḍūʿ necessary: anything liquid, solid or gaseous that exits from the front or rear private parts; the loss of consciousness through sleep, unconsciousness or insanity; touching of the skin of another person with desire; touching of one’s intimate private parts with the palm or the inner surface of the fingers.

The second is the major purification (ghuṣl) which means to totally wash the entire body with water not changed by anything from head to foot. Ghuṣl is incumbent on a man when sperm exits from his penis or the head of his penis enters a vagina. It is incumbent on a woman when sexual fluid exits from her or the head of a penis enters her vagina or after her menstrual period or after her postnatal bleeding stops or, in the case of a dry birth, after a child is born.

In the case that water is not available, or if one is ill or fears thirst, then one may make both the minor and the major ablution with plain earth that contains dust. In this case one, after first forming the intention, strikes the earth with one’s palms twice and then wipes first the face and then the right hand and arm up to the elbow followed by wiping the left hand and arm up to the elbow.

¹Brief descriptions are just that. The reader should be aware that there are many prescribed (wajibāt) as well as customary (sunnah) requirements that I have not mentioned due to the space parameters suggested by the organisers of the conference. For a more complete understanding of these acts and actions I would suggest the book *Knowledge of God* by Shaykh al-ʿAlawī, or *The Reliance of the Traveller* by Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri (trans. Nuh Ha Meem Keller) or *The Five Schools of Islamic Fiqh* compiled by Pir Muhammad Ibrahim Trust.

It should be clear to the reader that, even on the most gross physical plane, such attention to purity and purification would have a salutary effect on the practitioner. The Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, once said (or words to the same effect), “If a man had a stream flowing by his door and he bathed in it five times daily do you not think he would be cleansed thereby?”

It is obvious but within what is obvious is also what is less obvious and what is hidden.

What is obvious is clear. What is less obvious is the effect of such purification over a long period of time not just on the body but on the inner self. Consider that in the process of the minor purification, after first cleansing the anus and the genitals, seven major body parts are purified: hands, eyes, ears, mouth, nose, head, feet. Consider how these body parts lead us, each and everyone of us, so often away from Allāh and into disobedience to Allāh and rebellion against that which Allāh has prescribed for us.

Thus the conscious or God-fearing or God-conscious {mutaqqī} person is not content with merely washing these various parts of his or her body but, beyond, that physical washing they are concerned to keep these limbs and organs from disobedience and rebellion in the first place. To do so, to act in such a manner is no doubt a step along the way to perfection and wholeness {ṣalāh}.

What is hidden can be found in each part but for the sake of brevity let us look at water.

What is water? What is meant by water which is in no way changed? Imagine water in a crystal clear glass. Imagine that one drops one drop of ink from a fountain pen into that water. Is that water the same? What is really meant by adultery? What is adultery other than the adding of something impure to something pure? Consider what is meant then by the necessity of water not changed by something else not only as an outer requirement but as a description of the inner state necessary for truly making ablution. A state to which nothing impure is added. How does one arrive at such a state? Or how often is one in such a state? Every part of every one of these cornerstones which I lay out before you has hidden, not so hidden and obvious dimensions. Try to understand them as such.

By pure we mean water to which no ‘thing’ has been added, which is to say, unadulterated water. By this, those of understanding have meant that purification is attained when the medium or agent is not adulterated by any desire, which is to say that one is for, by, to and with Allāh alone without an other.

This is the purest water and it is the water of heavenly realms. Such water is, however, not always ready to hand or easy to come by so one is allowed by Law to make use of less pure water such as water melted from snow or water flowing in a stream into which other things may have washed but

which due to its flow and volume is clean. This water is likened by those of knowledge to purifying oneself out of desire for the rewards of Allāh and fear of His chastisements.

There is another form of water which is totally unsuitable and that is water which has been adulterated. By Law this is said to be 'changed by impurity' which those of knowledge understand to be by the existence of the self {an-nafs} for it is impossible to purify the self by the self.

If there is no unadulterated water one uses 'the dust of the earth', which is to say the apparent {aḍ-ḍhāhir}. In this way one purifies one self by the 'given' without necessarily having access to the 'meaning'. This is the pure obedience of the surrendered ones who say, "We hear and we obey." {2:285}. Perhaps these examples provide possible keys to understanding some of the inner dimensions to which we refer.

Since I have already written earlier about the witnessing let me go on to worship.

Worship in 'Islām, as in all traditions, takes many forms. Some of these forms are supererogatory but if they are they find their basis in the custom {sunnah} of the Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him and cover supplications, litanies, orisons, petitions, invocations, solicitations, adorations, thanksgiving and, in general, the praise of Allāh.

- aṣ-Ṣalāh is the name of a very specific form of worship which is prescribed for the Muslim which contains within in it all of the various aspects of worship mentioned above.

This ṣalāh² is prescribed for all adult, sane and free men and women five times daily. The times or periods of the ṣalah are also prescribed. They begin³ with the ṣalāh that comes immediately after the sun appears to have set beneath the western horizon. This is the time of al-maghrib. The next period commences when all the colour has gone out of the sky and the stars shine forth. This is al-ʿishā'. After this, depending on the season of the year, comes the time of true night in which there is no obligatory ṣalāh but people often rise during the mid and late night watches to offer sunnah ṣalāh until the time when the first crack {falaq} of light appears on the eastern horizon. This ushers in the third period which lasts until just before the sun appears to rise above the eastern horizon. This is al-fajr. When the sun appears to just pass its zenith the fourth period commences which is called aḍ-ḍhuhr and this goes on until the time when, if you stood a two meter stick on its end, the shadow cast by the sun would be twice the length of the rod. This is the fifth period or al-ʿaṣr. These then are the five periods of time in which all adult free sane men and women are obliged enter into the ṣalāh in order to that they might offer worship to their Creator and Lord, Allāh the Most Holy.

²There is no translation possible. It includes all of the forementioned dimensions of worship and then some.

³According to the Islamic way of reckoning the new day begins at sunset rather than the middle of the night.

Such are the periods of time — the ‘when’, as it were, of our being. And if we know when it is we are in time so also must we know ‘where’ it is that we are in space.

Orientation and direction is determined by knowing the bearings of the most ancient house {bayt al-ʿatīq} of worship which is located in Makkah⁴, a desert city sited in a desert valley on the Arabian peninsula. It is a simple cubical {kaʿbah} structure made of rough stone. Its foundations were raised by ʿIbrāhīm and his first born son, ʿIsmaʿīl, peace be upon them both, on the spot where our original parents — Adam and his wife Hawa {Eve}, peace be upon them both — worshipped Allāh when they had been rejoined on earth after leaving the Garden {al-jannah}. It is the same unadorned place of worship into which Muḥammad, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, during his younger years re-set the cornerstone during one of its rare, but periodic restorations and it is the same place of worship that he later cleansed of idols in his adulthood and so restored the Kaʿbah to the original pristine Adamic state in which ʿIbrāhīm and ʿIsmaʿīl, peace be upon them, had worshipped Allāh.

I have heard people who are not Muslims say that we worship this building or that we worship the black meteor which serves as its cornerstone. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Kaʿbah is no more and no less than the first place where human beings worshipped upon this earth. It is, if you like, the place where worship originated here on earth and we orient our selves to it in remembrance of those origins — the first place of worship⁵.

I have also heard it said that Muslims always face toward the East when they make their ‘prayers’ or ṣalāh but this also is another misconception, for, in truth, we face in whatever direction {qiblah} that aligns us most directly to the Ancient House in Makkah. Thus people on the Indian sub-continent face to the West, people in central Asia face South-West, people in southern Africa face North East, people in Europe face South-East and so forth.

Inside there is nothing save two posts which hold up the central roof beam, some lamps for light and a staircase which leads to the roof. There are no pictures, no stained glass, no statues. There is nothing to distract one from worship and focusing upon Allāh rather than ‘things’.

Assuming then the worshipper is in a state of ritual purity and is facing the correct direction and is within one of the prescribed time periods, let me proceed to delineate the movements of the ṣalāh.

⁴In the beginning of the dispensation granted to Muḥammad, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, the Muslims faced towards al-Quds ash-Sharīf {Jerusalem} as they did after the time of Yaqūb {Jacob}, peace be upon him. After the Muslims had settled in Madinah {which had many Jewish date growers}, the chief rabbi, ʿAbdullāh ibn Salām, recognised and accepted ʿIslām. Shortly thereafter Allāh sent down the Revelation which changed the direction {qiblah} to Makkah. This was in the second year of the Hijrah during the month of Shaʿbān and after some 16 months after the Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, had made his Hijrah {Migration} from Makkah to Madinah.

⁵And the place to which we return in pilgrimage {al-Ḥajj}

The ṣalāh consists of five basic body positions: standing, bowing, prostrating, kneeling and a concluding turn to the right and the left. These positions are taken in utmost concentration and are combined, in accord with the time of day or night, in sets {rak'ah} of two, three or four.

Certain utterances are connected to each position. Again depending upon the time of day or night these are spoken out loud or under the breath. Some of these utterances are derived from the Qur'ān, others are derived from prophetic supplications and litanies and yet others are supplications of the individual worshipper. The duration of the ṣalāh is fixed by the number of cycles and the length of the Qur'ānic reading chosen by the individual worshipper ('abid) or the prayer-leader ('imām). The shortest form⁶ of the ṣalāh is that of the dawn (fajr) prayer which is two cycles (rak'atayn) in which the Qur'ānic verses are recited aloud. Both the noon (ḍuḥr) and afternoon ('aṣr) ṣalāh are four cycles and in both of these the Qur'ānic verses are recited silently or beneath the breath. The ṣalāh which follows the setting of the sun (al-maghrib) consists of three cycles and in this ṣalāh the Qur'ānic verses of the first two cycles are recited aloud as they are in the nighttime ṣalāh ('ishā) which again consists of four cycles rather than three. Supererogatory (nafl or sunnah) ṣalāh are, with a single exception, always two cycles (rak'atayn). The single exception is the final supererogatory ṣalāh of the day which, fittingly, is a single cycle and is called the wiṭr or odd ṣalāh.

No doubt this may seem bewildering to the non-Muslim. In actuality, it is quite simple once one accepts this as the rhythm of life, in which case it follows that one then spends every day of what remains of one's life⁷ following these cycles — often in different parts of the world and sometimes in sickness and other times in health, in good times and bad. It is a case of 'for better or worse until death do us part'. That is another part of the covenant with the Lord. Perpetual prayer.

Perhaps this recital of numbers and positions may sound mechanical, but the mechanical aspect is really dependent on one's interior state and whether one is fully 'present' or, on the contrary, absent. In the case of absence it appears as a long dull boring set of repetitive exercises accompanied, often, by learning another language and on top of that committing to memory long sets of verses (āyāt) of the Qur'ān as well as prophetic supplications and litanies. Almost nothing, save one self of course, is left to one's own personal initiative except *the doing*, the act, al-'amal and al-'amal, the hope. Sometimes one touches the dimension referred to in the verse which tells us that there is a time which is better than a thousand months — 83 and one third years — or a lifetime.

⁶Though this is the shortest form again the duration in time depends on what Qur'ānic verses are read.

⁷Save in the case of women who are excused from the ṣalāh during their periods of menstruation and during childbirth and the days following it. There are also exceptions made both for men and women in the case of travelling when certain prayers can be shortened or joined to each other and in the case of sickness when one may make the ṣalāh in one's sick bed if need be.

خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ

KhAYRUM-MIN ʿALFI ShĀHR

Better than a thousand months
{97:3}

And there are lot of in-between times but the ‘how’ in fact does not really matter for what matters is the mimetic act mirroring in time our condition in the first world of particles (ʿalam adh-dharru-l-ʿawwal), when, floating in the column of light (ʿamudu-n-nūr) in pre-eternity, formless light was transformed into form and we were content, individually and corporately, to praise Allāh forever, overcome, as it was and as it is we are by the Ineffable Majesty and Refulgent Glory of that Being.

In this world we are as Allāh described us:

جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا

JAʿALNĀKUM ʿUMMATAŅW-WASAṬĀ

We made you to be a community of the middle (or of the heart).
{2:143}

as it came to our grandfather ʿIbrāhīm and all who went before and after him, peace be upon them,

إِذْ قَالَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ أَسْلِمْ قَالَ أَسْلَمْتُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

ʿIDĥ QĀLĀ LAĤŪ RABBUĤŪ ʿASLIM: QĀLA ʿASLAMTU LI-RABBI-L-ĀLAMĪN

when his Lord said to him, “Surrender,” he said, “I surrender to the Lord of the Worlds.
{2:131}

This is the carrying out of that surrender, the physical act of surrender which is an infinitesimal repayment, as it were and as it is, of the debt {danā} incurred by living — as such it is our dīn.

Perhaps along the edges of what he have written the reader can catch a hint of what is meant by the ṣalāh. But even if only the barest outline is glimpsed we trust the reader understands that the ṣalāh, and indeed all forms of deep worship, definitely provide a means to perfect one’s being.

It is also important to understand that all of the 'acts' are synergistic and contain within themselves additional attributes. For instance the ṣalāh cannot be said to be either supplication or orison or praise or litany of negation and affirmation but rather all of these working together directed to Allāh and within one's self. In the case of men⁸ the ṣalāh is often performed in conjunction with other men who join together with the same intention and orientation. This can exponentially increase the efficacy of the ṣalāh and brings the whole dynamic of community {ummah} into the equation.

If the ṣalāh can be said to the rhythm of the day then fasting is the rhythm of the year.

- Ṣawm or fasting is prescribed {wajib} for every adult male and female who is sane, capable of fasting and, if a woman, not menstruating. It is not prescribed for children, the insane or someone who, due to advanced years or an incurable illness, is not physically able to fast. For none of these is it prescribed that they must make up their lost days. Those who are ill but hope to recover; those who, perhaps, like nursing mothers, might be weakened by fasting, those who are travelling; those who have deserted {murtadd} the covenant; or women who are menstruating, must all make up their lost days with a day of fasting for every day 'missed'.

This fast is prescribed once a year every year at the time of the ninth lunar period {Ramaḍān} from the period immediately at the crack of dawn {falaq} until after the apparent setting of the sun {maghrib}. During this time no food, drink, medicine, smoke etc. may enter the body and neither must the body take part in an act of sexual communion with any other body.

There are also additional days during the year such as the six consecutive days in the month of Ṣhawwal, the first nine days of the month of Pilgrimage {Dhu-l-Hijjah} and, if one is not on Ḥajj oneself, the day when all the people gather at the Mount of Mercy {Jabalu-r-Rahmah} in the Day of Standing in the Valley of Knowing {Yawmu-l-'Arifāt}. There are also recommended ways of fasting during the Sacred Months of Dhu-l-Qa'adah, Dhu-l-Hijjah, Rajab, and the 9th and 10th of the first lunar period of Muḥarram. Mondays and Thursdays are also recommended fast days and also the three white days, the 13th, 14th and 15th lunar days of each lunar period.

One may also fast every other day as did the Prophet Dawūd, peace be upon him.

The benefits of fasting, if only on the physical body, are becoming increasingly well understood in Western cultures which have almost abandoned fasting as a religious obligation though early Christians fasted during Lent and modern Jews still do especially on the the Day of Atonement.

In the East, among the religious communities of both China and India as well as other areas in South East Asia and Oceania, the benefits of fasting have long been understood and practiced.

⁸Women also may pray in congregation but it is not prescribed for them as it is for men.

If we examine the spiritual rewards we would have to use numerous pages to cite all of many references that detail the benefits to the soul and spirit of human beings as a result of fasting.

However, and odd as this may be, all of these are secondary or tertiary reasons for fasting. Perhaps instead of reason we might say benison but even having said that we would be beside the point.

The real point for fasting is that Allāh ordered us to fast.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ
كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

YĀĀʾAYYUHĀ-L-LADḥĪNĀ ʾĀMANŪ KUTIBAʿALAYKUMU-Ṣ-ṢIYYĀMU
KAMĀ KUTIBAʿĀLA-L-LADḥĪNĀ MIN QABĒLIKUM TATAQŪN

O you who believe! Fasting is written for you
just as it was written for those who came before so you that you may safeguard⁹
{your self for Allāh}
{2:184}

Again faith is wed to action. If you believe — fast. Benefits there are in abundance, among them being that fasting is another of the possible means of perfection. But, and this is a big but, that is all after the fact. The fact remains, as it so often does in ʿIslām, that the proof is in the act. Yes one must first have faith, one must believe but...belief without action is casuistry at best and hypocrisy at the very least. A subtle way of trying to fool That which cannot be fooled

هُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ

HUWA MAʿAKUM ʾAYNA MĀ KUṬUM

He is with you wherever you are
{57:4}

The actual time of fasting, the ninth lunar period, is based on sighting the new moon of the ninth lunar period. This time changes every year since the lunar calendar, which is not intercalated to allow for the difference between solar and lunar times which is approximately eleven days per solar cycle and a full thirty three years for the moon to complete the circuit.

⁹ʿaqwa = from waqā = guard, preserve, safeguard, shelter, preserve, protect. Commonly translated as 'God' fearing, pious, devout etc.

The fast of the winter with its short and often cold days and long nights is in no way the same as the fast of summer with its long and, very often hot days and very short nights. The trials and the rewards are quite different — indeed the whole taste of the fast changes as the times breaking of fast moves through the seasons of hot soups to cold sherbets and the short often sleepless nights turn into long periods affording the luxury of intense nighttime worship.

At the very beginning of this piecewe mentioned that the Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, was fasting when he first began to receive the Holy Qurʾān. This was the month of Ramaḍān and from that year forward the Angel would spend Ramaḍān with the Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon them, reviewing {tartil} and setting the order {ratab} of the Qurʾān.

Because Ramaḍān is, *par excellence*, the time of the Qurʾān, Muslims try to make it a practice of reading the Qurʾān through in its entirety over a period of twenty-nine or thirty days and if a ḥafīḍh (one who has internally preserved the Qurʾān in its entirety) is in the area many Muslims stand in congregation {jamaʿa} while the entire Qurʾān is recited in a series of long nightly cycles of supererogatory ṣalāh known as the ṣalātu-t-tarawwih which, though not prescribed {wajib} either by Allāh or His Messenger, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, has come¹⁰ to be regarded in the Sunni world almost as a sunnah.

Though it may appear to outsiders that fasting for a month is something tough in truth Ramaḍān is a time which is awaited as one awaits a person that one loves, and when Ramaḍān finally comes to an end, it comes as a feeling of loss and a sense that one's real spiritual life is departing and that one is descending into a grosser and more materialistic state. This of course can be offset by the numerous opportunities for supererogatory fasting but, in reality, there is nothing like that actual time of Ramaḍān especially as one feels a great sense of connection to the upwards of one billion other human beings who are simultaneously also observing the fast all over the world.

With the end of the month of fasting comes giving the excess of what one needs to feed oneself and those whom one is obliged to support. This is called the Zakāh of the ʿIyd al-Fiṭr which consists of giving to the less fortunate a little over 2 liters of the main staple food of that area in which one lives. For instance if one is living in an area where bread is the staple diet then wheat is given or other grains like rice, maize or millet. This zakāh is given for every member of the family living under one roof and it is best given before the ṣalāh on the morning of the Day of al-ʿIyd}.¹¹

¹⁰ It was a sunnah as a personal practice but it was an innovation (bidʿah) on the part of the second Khalif, ʿUmar al-Khaṭṭāb, may Allāh be content with him, that made it into a congregational practice.

¹¹ ʿIyd means recurring happiness or joy and there are two such days in the course of the year. The first is after the Fast and is called ʿId al-Fiṭr of the ever returning happiness of naturalness, and the other is called the ʿId al-Adha, or the ever returning joy of the sacrifice which occurs after the day after the standing on Arafah during the Ḥajj.

This Zakātu-l-Fitr is directly connected to the month of fasting and has, as one of its aims, that as many people as possible are assured an adequate amount of food to eat on the feast day. The aim of equality or distribution is, however, secondary to the binding obligation placed by Allāh on all free Muslims, male, female, adult and child who are possessed of a payable amount of surplus to distribute a minimum 2.5% of their surplus wealth in zakāh, once a lunar year.

- Zakāh as such means growth, blessings, an increase in good, purification or praise. In *ṣharḥ*ah or sacred law it is the name for a particular amount of property which must be paid to certain types of people. Abu Shujāʿ states that, "It is called zakāh because one's wealth grows through the blessings of giving it and the prayers of those who receive it and because it purifies its giver of sins and praises him by testifying to the genuineness of his faith."

Zakāh is due on livestock, some food crops, gold and silver, trade goods, mined wealth and treasure and it is due to the minimum amount of 2.5% and the minimum amount that necessitates its payment has been clearly and scrupulously calculated by the scholars in each case.¹²

Zakāh is incumbent (wajib) upon free males and females both adult and children. It is to be distributed, as we said, once in a lunar year and it is to be distributed among the following eight types of people: 1) the poor, meaning, in general, someone who does not have enough to suffice him or herself, 2) those short of money, meaning those who have something to spend but not enough to suffice their needs which also includes those whose religious studies keep them from earning a living, 3) those who collect and distribute the zakāh for the community who can receive as much as it would cost the community to hire someone to do the job, 4) those whose hearts need to be reconciled, which covers those who are reverts¹³ to ʿIslām who need their certainty increased or those, or, who due their act of embracing ʿIslām, are alienated from their kin, 5) Those slaves that are Muslim and wish to buy their way free from their owners, 6) Those who are in debt or incur debt in order to reconcile hostile groups of people, or one who has gone into debt to support his family, or who has gone into debt by guaranteeing a loan for someone else who is then unable to pay and thus the guarantor is forced to forfeit the bond, 7) those who are voluntarily engaged in military operations on behalf of Muslims and the Muslim community and 8) Travellers in need of money, meaning anyone journeying among a community in which zakāh is collected provided the journey is not contrary to the prescriptions of Allāh.

¹² On camels, for instance it is due above thirty head while on gold, for instance, it is due on 84.7 grams on which 2.1175 grams is thus due as zakāh. My objective is not to go into this level of detail and the reader interested in such should contact a known scholar (faqih) or one of the tables in the books relating the fiqh of Zakāh.

¹³ A person cannot really be said to "convert" to ʿIslām since everyone is born a Muslim and it is only their parents who teach them otherwise. Thus, in the case of people whose parents raised them to be something else and then return to ʿIslām, they are usually known as reverts rather than converts.

As with purification, prayer and fasting, the giving of charity is well known in almost all traditions.

There are some people who, because they find many similarities in 'Islām to Christianity and Judaism, say that Muḥammad, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, merely borrowed things from here and there and somehow 'made up' 'Islām. Rather they should see that these elements exist in all the traditions since they all emerge from the same single source. As Allāh is One, so Truth {al-ḥaqq} is One, and there is thus a certain universality that can be seen in all of the various ṣharī'ah which have been revealed over time from the same single source — Allāh.

In the very first chapter after the opening sūrah we find in the third and fourth verses Allāh saying to the Messenger, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, and, by extension, saying to us:

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ
وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ
وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ

‘ALLADḥĪNA YU‘MINŪN BI-L-ĠĤAYBI
WA YUQIMŪNA-Ṣ-ṢALĀTA WA MIMĀ RAZAQNĀHUM YUNFIQŪN
WA-L-LADḥĪNA YU‘MINŪNA BI-MĀĀ ‘UNZILA ‘ILAYKA
WA MĀĀ ‘UNZILA MIN QABLIKA WA BI-L-‘AKḥĪRATI HUM YUQINŪN

Those who believe in the Unseen
and establish Ṣalāh and spend out of that which We have bestowed on them
and who believe in what is revealed to you and what was revealed before you
and are certain of the Final World

{2:3-4}

There is certainly no doubt in my own mind or heart of the entirely Providential character of the zakāh as a means of purification and as a means of perfecting one's self and character.

Especially for those of us who come from more material realms, the practice of the zakāh puts us through many changes and we are forced to reveal, in spite of whatever level of perfection we may have achieved, just how 'hard' our heart can sometimes be when it comes to giving that which we take to be our own. The above line, "who spend out of that which We have bestowed on them," is very helpful in remembering Where everything is coming from.

Wealth and possessions are not really one's own but rather they are a loan from Allāh and as such another means of testing the strength and certainty of one's faith {‘imān}.

If the ṣalāh is the practice of a day and the fasting is the practice of a month and the zakāh the practice of a year, then the pilgrimage (al-ḥajj) is the practice of a lifetime.

- al-Ḥajj or the pilgrimage is the journey from one's native land to the Ancient House of Worship (baytu-l-ʿatīq) in Makkah al-Mukarramah and the performance, whilst at the House and within its wider precincts (ḥaram), of certain sequential (munassaq) rites which derive from the time of Adam and Hawa, peace be upon them, and ʿIbrahim, Ismāʿīl and Ḥajjar, peace be upon them, and Muḥammad, peace and blessings be upon him and his family.

Simply stated these rites, given both the intention and the means of realisation, include the donning by men¹⁴ of two seamless white garments of ʿiḥrām, the seven circumambulations of the Holy House of worship, the seven successive passages between the hills of Safah and Marwah called Saʿy, the drinking of the water from the Well of Zamzam, the travelling to the valley of ʿArafāt, the standing on the ninth day of the pilgrimage at the Mount of Mercy (Jabalu-r-Raḥmah) from between the noon prayer until after the setting of the sun, the racing down to Muzdalifah, the resting there by night whilst collecting the small stones used in stoning the Shayāṭīn at Mina, the sacrifice of an animal, the cutting of hair or shaving of the head and a final seven circumambulations of the Kaʿbah before setting off for the return to one's homeland.

It is almost impossible to begin to relate the profundity of the experience of the Ḥajj. It is many experiences all contained within in a process which takes place in different places over many days, or months if you include the preparations and the joyful return to your family and community.

In essence the Ḥajj is an amalgam of rites commemorating three different eras in the life of humans.

First of all it is the celebration of an event which took place in the antediluvian era when our common parents, peace be upon them, were first reunited upon this earth after they had left the Garden.

According to tradition our mother, Hawa (Eve), journeyed from somewhere in Africa in the area of the Ethiopian head waters of the Nile and our father Adam journeyed from the isle of Serendib (Sri Lanka), drawn to reunite with each other on earth as they had been united in the Garden.

Here it is very important to understand that for Muslims the coming of Adam and Hawa to earth is not a curse or a punishment but rather was a fulfillment of the destiny that Allāh had marked out for them before they were placed in the Garden. This is major difference between the Islamic perspective and the prevailing Judeo-Christian outlook. This is known from the following verse:

¹⁴ Women have their own garb. Note this is a very superficial picture of the rites of pilgrimage, which are highly detailed and extremely precise. I suggest that those wishing to know the details, speak with a knowledgeable scholar (ʿalim) or consult one of the many books (a few of which I mentioned earlier) which clarify all of the rites.

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً

WA 'IDh QĀLA RABBUKALI-L-MALĀĀ'IKATI 'INNI JĀ'ILUN FĪ-L-'ARḌI KḤALĪFAH

And {remember} when your Lord said to the angels,
"I am going to place My representative on earth"?
{2:30}

From the Islamic perspective there is no such thing as original sin and, though Adam and Hawa, peace be upon them, were rebellious {ma' siyah} and disobeyed the Order of Allāh, they did so as part of a greater Plan that Allāh had in mind for human beings and, importantly, they came to earth after having both sought, and gained, the *forgiveness* of Allāh. One of the hallmarks of the rites of pilgrimage is the idea of the necessity on the part of all humans to seek and obtain forgiveness for their faults {dhamb} and rebellious behaviour. Surely the reader must find, as does the writer, when peering into the heart, many things we regret committing and hope could and would be forgiven.

That this is so, and necessarily so, is precisely because we are not immaculate {ma'sūm}. And because we are not immaculate it inevitably follows that we make mistakes and that we must seek forgiveness from Allāh Who is, we know, for He has revealed it to be so, that Being Who is by nature *the Forgiving* {al-ghāfir} and *the Mercy Full* {ar-raḥīm} and always Just {ʿadl}.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

'INNA-LLĀHA GHĀFŪRUR-R-RAḤĪM

Truly Allāh {is} Forgiving, Bestowing Mercy
{2:173}

Finding one's self forgiven is without a doubt a truly liberating and realisable experience. If one can perform the entire Hajj in a way that is acceptable to Allāh, then it is possible that all of one's faults can be wiped out, obliterated — one can, in short, return to one's original Virgin Being.

Thus forgiveness and absolution are closely connected to the rites as well as the renewal of one's life in the sense that when our parents found each other here on earth after they had been sent forth from the Garden of Paradise, they were renewing on earth their relationship in the Garden. By returning to the place we all came from we also renew our selves. By Allāh, just the knowing and certainty of this knowledge is of inestimable worth.

—al-ʿinsānu-l-kāmil—

To know where to go.

This just barely points to the antediluvian dimension inherent in the rites of pilgrimage. Consider it from the times of the scrolls {ṣuhuf} of ʿIbrāhīm, peace be upon him.

The story is disparately told depending on what side of the line descending from that mighty law giving Messenger of Allāh you may happen to derive. For the Muslim, of course, the question doesn't arise, given the necessary belief that the Qurʾān, as the final, and hence definitive Word of Allāh, contains the accurate story of events that took place some 3,750 years ago — events which are totally alive and entirely relevant in the present moment as well as into the foreseeable future.

مَا كَانَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا
وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا
وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

MĀ KĀNA ʿIBRĀHĪMU YAHŪDIYĀN̄W-WA LĀ NAṢRĀNTIYYĀN̄
WA LĀKIN KĀNA ḤANIFAM-MUSLIMĀN̄
WA MĀ KĀNA MINA-L-MUṢḤRIKĪN

Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian
He was a self surrendered ḥanif
and he was not an idolater
{3:67}

ʿIbrāhīm, to the best of our knowledge, is the first wholly surrendered post flood Prophet from the line of Adam and Nūḥ {Noah} who was granted the whole vision of the One Truth of the Single Being and renewed the Law {ṣharīʿah} for post flood humanity..

Allāh granted him to be the experiential witness of Truth {al-ḥaqq} and he thus came to believe and dwelt in the station {maqam} of the friend {khalīl} of Allāh. As the Friend of Allāh he was given a Book {ṣuhufi ʿIbrāhīm 87:19} and thus was prophet {nabi} and universal messenger {rasūl} and the father of two lines of prophets {ambiyāʾ} and Law giving messengers, including Mūsā {Moses}, Dawūd, {David}, Isā {Jesus} and Muḥammad, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon them all.

There is no room here to even begin to tell the tale of his life and then flight out of Ur, or of his life as a shepherd, dweller in tents, sojourner in the land of Goshen, or the story of how, after many years with his wife Sarah, and they were both in their eighties and had no any children that Sarah gave him her Egyptian hand maiden Hajar, who bore him his first son: ʿIsmaʿīl meaning He hears.

Sarah, at a very advanced age, subsequently bore a son, 'Ishāq, may peace be upon him and his brother, and while Isma'il was still an infant, 'Ibrāhīm took him and his mother in accord with the Order of Allāh to settle them in a valley in the Hijāz just inland from where the Red Sea flanks the coasts of the Arabian Peninsula. Some forty days south by camel and almost due south of where he was dwelling in northern Sinai in the Wilderness of Paran near the Seven Wells, {Bir Sab'a}.

The valley of Bakkah is surrounded by fierce basalt mountains. At its very centre is Makkah, where our Urfather, Adam, peace be upon him, first prayed either in a tent sent down from among the tents of the Garden or in a sacred enclosure marked out only by the wing of an angel, but which ever of the two stories is correct, it was here that he first entered into the ṣalāh.

And it was here in accord with an Order of Allāh {ʾamru-llāh} that 'Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, left his young son and his mother Hājar. As he departed from the valley he asked Allāh,

رَبَّنَا إِنِّي أَسْكَنْتُ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي بِوَادٍ غَيْرِ زَرْعٍ عِنْدَ بَيْتِكَ الْمُحَرَّمِ
رَبَّنَا لِتَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ فَاجْعَلْ أَفْنَدَةً مِنَ النَّاسِ يَهْوَى إِلَيْهِمْ
وَأَرْزُقْهُمْ مِنَ الثَّمَرِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْكُرُونَ

RABBANĀĀ ʾINNĪ ʾASKANTU MIN DḥURIYYATĪ BI-WĀDI GHAYRI ZURʿIN
ʾINDA BAYTIKA-L-MUḤARRAM

RABBANA

LI-TUQĪMŪ-Ṣ-SALĀTA FA-J-ʿAL ʾAFIDATAM-MINA-N-NĀSI YAHWĪ ʾILAYHIM
WA-R-ZUQHUM-MINA-Ṭḥ-ṬḥAMARĀTI LAʿALAHUM YASHKURŪN

Oh Lord, Surely I have settled some of my family in an uncultivated valley
near to Your Holy House

So that, our Lord, they may establish the ṣalāh,

{Oh You!}

cause people's hearts to yearn toward them

and grant them fruitful sustenance that they might have cause to be grateful.

{14:37}

It was precisely for the reason of establishing the ṣalāh, and by so doing both fulfilling the covenant at the point of origin and, if Allāh willed, attracting the hearts of people so that they, in turn, would be drawn back to the place of their origin. 'Ibrāhīm, peace be upon him, also petitioned Allāh that his family living around the Holy House might be sustained by that fruit which would cause them to be grateful to Allāh not out of blind faith but, rather, out of direct experience of this miraculous sustenance.

Some 3,750 years later the proof {hujjah or dalil} of that supplication is still being manifest every year in the Hajj. Indeed for most of its history the holy precinct in Makkah, heart of the Valley of Bakkah, has been thronged with worshippers even during the age of ignorance {al-jahiliyyah} when the dwellers of the area gradually sank into ignorance, superstition and idolatry.

Muḥammad, the son of ʿAbdullāh, the son of Abū Muṭalib was in the direct line of descent which traces back through time to ʿIsmaʿil and to ʿIbrāhīm and Hajjar, peace be upon them all.

And it is that Muḥammad, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, that cleansed the Holy House of idols and restored to their original purity all of the Ibrahīmīc and Adamic rites of the Hajj, the Pilgrimage to the House of Allah {al-hajj ʿila baytu-llāh}.

I have not told any of the story by writing this. I have not told of the anxious mother running from mountain to mountain seeking water for her child, I have not written of the angel who, scraping away the desert with its wing, caused a spring of water — Zamzam — to burble forth.

Neither have I written of the time when ʿIbrāhīm returned from the North with the order to sacrifice his almost teen-age son, a son who was totally surrendered and compliant, nor have I told of the ram that was offered in place of the boy. Nor have I told of the Ṣhayṭān who appeared three times in an attempt to persuade ʿIbrāhīm not to sacrifice ʿIsmaʿil, peace be upon them both. So many stories, so little space.

قَالَ يَٰأَبَتِ افْعَلْ مَا تُؤْمَرُ سَتَجِدُنِي إِنِ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الصَّابِرِينَ

QĀLA YAĀĀ ʿABATI ʿAFAL MĀ TUʿMAR
SATAJIDUNĪ ʿINSHĀĀĀ ʿALLĀHU MINA-Ṣ-ṢABIRĪN

He said, "Oh my Father do as you are commanded
You will find me, if Allāh wills, one who is steadfast."

{37:102}

So much of what Allāh narrated the Qurʾān forms the basis for the acts that are performed in the Hajj which, itself rightly seen, is the yearly re-enactment of certain Adamic and Ibrahīmīc rites. Each pilgrim, by performing them recapitulates in his or her singular time the hiero-historical acts of earlier ages and, in so doing, has the possibility through a sublime form of communion of entering that timeless time where the dragon eais its own tail and time has its end — and beginning.

And if we have been granted this possibility, we have so because another of the family of Adam and ʿIbrāhīm restored and renewed the rites so that we might be able to connect ourselves to the source.

رَبَّنَا وَابْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ

RABBANĀ WA-B-‘ATH FIHIM RASŪLAM-MINHUM

Our Lord! Raise up from them a Messenger from among them
{2:129}

One who would, “Recite from Your Revelations and instruct them in the Book and the Wisdom and cause {his people} to grow.” {2:129} {see Deut:18:18, “I will put my words in his mouth.” and John 16:5, “He shall not speak of himself but whatever he shall hear, that shall he speak.”}

Muḥammad, peace and blessings upon him, came as the Mercy of Allāh and truly he is the Comforter foretold who spoke what he heard with words that were placed in his mouth by Allāh.

He purified and restored the ancient Ways of Adam and ‘Ibrāhīm and, in accord with the Last Testament he is the Seal of Prophecy just as Qur’ān is the Final Word containing, among its many Signs, the Final Law {sharī‘ah} by which all humans would finally live, the “Way of Truth {dīnu-l-ḥaqq} which shall be raised up or exalted {li-yuḏḥhirahu} over all other Ways.” {48:28} Just as he so clearly is the cornerstone rejected so he is the placer of that cornerstone which completes.

مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِّن رِّجَالِكُمْ
وَلَكِن رَّسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ

MĀ KĀNA MUḤAMMADUN ‘ABĀĀ‘AHADIM-MIR-RJĀLIKUM
WA LĀKINI-R-RASŪL-LLĀHI WA KHĀTAMA-N-NABIYYĪN

Muḥammad is not the father of any one of your men
but he is the Messenger of Allāh and the Seal of the Prophets.
{33:40}

All of this came together some 1400 years ago and can come together every time any one can bring it together. As in purification {ṭahara}, witnessing {shahadah}, the ṣalāh, and the zākah, it is always the potential that confronts the believer and the potential is that which is latent, concealed and hidden within the outer form of the rite. It is what is undisclosed that is the secret hidden within the manifest which is manifest only to the degree that the pilgrim is willing, in this, as in all else, to surrender totally to Allāh and allow Allāh to unfold {jalā} the Truth in an event that takes several days and centres itself around many sacred centres until it dissolves in the final circumambulation.

Again I apologize to the Muslim reader for skipping so lightly over such vast drainage basins and profound abysses of misunderstanding as well as such oceans of knowledge. I also apologize to the non-Muslim reader for moving so quickly over what may be a huge amount of unfamiliar territory and terms that may sound quite foreign. The subject is not one that yields itself readily to facile simplification at any level.

The central point I am trying to make clear through all of these words is perhaps spelled out in the well known tag, "Practice makes perfect," though perhaps not in the way that tag was first meant.

It would be more correct to say that all of these practices, both in themselves and, synergistically, in themselves and in relation to each other as well as to the totality, offer the sincere practitioner the possibility of a form of perfection — a perfection of being in which the being comes in accord with Being — or, I might say, that the purified mirror of the heart reflects something more than itself.

There are some who say, "Ah, but how can the effulgent be other than just that?" I would agree that it was never other than what it was but it only appeared that what it was was obscured by the illusion of not knowing, and I would remind any interlocutor to be humble for each of us makes mistakes. That is, in the form of a question, "Who among us is perfect?"

If there is no one among us who is perfect, how can we know what is perfect through our eyes of imperfection, unless it be that there is something within us that is a piece of the perfection capable of reflecting the Image of Perfection. A mirror that is a splinter of the light which, when you can manage to get it somehow all lined up right, reflects the Light in, and out of, itself.

All these things which might appear outwardly like mechanical rites and rituals are in essence very precise programs for orienting and aligning the practitioner to the Light, to the Source, to Allāh.

They work. This has been amply proven over the course of centuries.

Does everybody get it? Are the acts salvific in themselves?

Hardly. As always, and necessarily, that depends on the intention and state of the practitioner.

"Is there no other way?"

Of that I have no idea since, as a practicing Muslim, my life is lived wholly within the form given by Allāh which is, I believe, the form that has been perfected for all human beings.

Do I not see 'other possibilities of Truth'?

I see remains of those possibilities in every Tradition and honour the residue of the Truth in them.



I have left one subject to the end and that is the subject of jihād or struggle.

While everyone agrees that the witnessing, the ṣalāh, the fast, the zakāh and the pilgrimage constitute the five basic ‘facts’ of ʿIslām many Muslims hold jihād to be central to true faith {ʿimān}. Certainly for many people outside of ʿIslām jihād, or at least a mistaken idea of what that might be, is the only thing they know about ʿIslām and constitutes one of the most mis-represented aspects of ʿIslām. If for that reason alone it would worth taking a few pages to try to clarify what it is and isn’t.

It is combat and struggle with the forces of oppression both internal and external.

For myself I can see, experientially {dḥawq} after many years of trying to live as a surrender human being in the world, that struggle and combat {jihād} are very much part of that on-going process of surrender {ʿistislām} and the peace {salām} which arises from surrender

There is a well known saying which is oft-quoted whose riwayat and isnad, that is all of its recorders and the chain of its transmission, I have never found thus leaving the saying questionable as a certain {ṣaḥīḥ} ḥadīth but certainly quite sound as wisdom {ḥikmah}.

It seems that the Prophet, blessings of Allāh and peace be upon him, was returning from a battle when, in response to a statement by one of his companions concerning the magnitude of the battle, he said, “We are returning from the lesser struggle {jihad} to the great combat {jihād}.” Upon being asked what the greater jihad might be, he replied, “The struggle with one’s self {nafs}.”

I am also aware that among the ʿithnāʿashariyyah Shīʿi there is no possibility of truly waging lesser jihad until the coming of al-Mahdi. This because there no longer remains corporate consciousness of what ʿIslām really is or isn’t, which is to say there is no one manifest at the moment in time and space in which I am writing this who is outwardly manifesting as our ʿImān and Guide {al-mahdi}.

I recall very well the words of advice rendered to the Muslim community by ʿImān Jaʿfār, peace be upon him, who said, “He who seeks to command is lost. He who wishes to command is lost. Beware of those who command and who consider themselves leaders for, as Allāh is my witness, the man behind whom the sound of footsteps is raised will only perish and cause others to perish. He who believes himself to be chief is damned, he who tries to become one is damned, he who proclaims himself to be one is damned. Avoid leading people and people who want to lead.”

If we have no rightly guided leader, and it is obvious we do not, who is there who could lead us into the struggle or are we to follow some seventy two {thousand} odd would-be leaders?

This is a question every Muslim must ask him or her self looking at our situation today when the whole world has been turned upside down, not only in the world of the Unbelievers but also in the World of the People of the Book and manifestly within the Muslim world itself.

It is foretold in prophetic utterances that among the Signs of the Last Hour we shall see that, "knowledge will be withdrawn, civil strife will appear, stinginess shall be in the hearts of people, and harj will prevail. He was asked the meaning of harj and he said slaughter, {Bukhārī and Muslim transmitted it}, and a time in which, "a day will come when the killer will not know why he killed and one who is killed will not know for what reason he was killed." {Muslim transmitted it}

A time when "among the signs of that last hour will be the removal of knowledge, the prevalence of intoxication," {Bukhārī and Muslim transmitted it} and when, "The practice of trust is lost", a day "when rule is given to people who are unworthy of it." {Bukhārī transmitted it}

"Before the last hour there will be disturbances like pieces of a dark night in which a man will be a believer in the morning and a disbeliever in the evening or an disbeliever in the evening and a believer by morning. He who sits then will be better than he who gets up and he who walks will be better than he who runs. So brake your bows during those times, cut your bowstrings during them and strike your swords on the stones and be like the better of Adam's sons," {i.e.; Abel rather than Cain} {Abu Dawūd transmitted it}

Certainly when one reads the Books of Fiṭan which contain the Signs of the Times, one certainly sees many parallels to the present time in which we find ourselves. But then perhaps it is the same in every age and every time is the worst of times in accord with the prophetic saying, "The world is like a garment torn from end to end and hanging by a thread at the end of it — and that thread is about to be cut off." {Baihaqi transmitted it} "Show endurance for no time will come to you which will not be followed by one that is worse till you meet your Lord." {Bukhārī transmitted it} "A Muslim's best property will soon be sheep which he will take to the tops of the mountains and the places where the rain falls, fleeing with his dīn from civil agitation {fiṭnā} {Bukhārī transmitted it}

So it would be entirely fair to inquire as to what struggle there is in this time?

In this time nearly 80% of the refugees in the world are Muslim. Far from being bloodthirsty warriors out to conquer the world, the Muslims are in the process of being conquered in a piecemeal fashion seemingly under a policy of divide and conquer be it in Turkic, Sinotic or post-Soviet Central Asia, Burma, Kashmir, Chechnya, Bosnia, Palestine, or in lands where Muslims are daily oppressed by secular, 'socialist' or 'religious' 'muslim' governments. Obviously for those living in those lands there can be little question about the nature of the outer jihād. It stares them in the face.

For such people there is and can be no real question as to where combat and struggle {jihad} need be waged — it is only all too obvious.

The question we who live outside the actual realm of war {daru-l-harb} confront is whether it is incumbent on us to put our bodies in the service of the oppressed. The answer is heavily debated and we each make our own decisions. Without doubt, if we have the means, we must physically aid those who are daily being oppressed as they are in Kashmir, Chechenya, Bosnia and Palestine.

أُذِنَ لِلَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَ بِأَنَّهُمْ ظَلِمُوا ۖ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ نَصْرِهِمْ لَقَدِيرٌ

ʾUDḥINA LI-LADḥĪNA YUQĀṬALŪNA BI-ʾANAHUM DḥULIMŪ :
WA INNA-LLĀHA ʿALĀ NAṢRIHIM LAQADĪR

Permission is given to fight because they have been oppressed
and Allāh has the power to aid them.

{22:39}

The 'how' of our struggle is in accord with the well known prophetic reply to the question as to the degrees of struggle with the oppressor {dḥālīm}. Evil must be resisted first with one's hands, then with one's words and if all else fails one must resist with one's heart.

Outside daru-l-harb in the nebulous world of daru-l-ahd in which we, as Muslims, are not directly oppressed and have no manifest leader {ʾimām} or guide {mahdi} there remains for the necessity {wajib} of struggling against myriad examples of subtle and not so subtle oppression that everywhere surround us and pervade our lives. We must use our wealth, if we have it or our words if we cannot use our hands and certainly within our hearts we must absolutely resist all forms of oppression with out give or let especially the oppression the comes from covering over {kufr} the Truth .

Knowing what we know of leaders and being led we move only where the door is open and, if the heart is not hopelessly hardened, the first open door we all have is the one that opens into our self.

The realm of making peace in the self is the very basis of the real work facing every believer:

رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي وَأَسْلَمْتُ

RABBI ʾINNĪ DḥALAMTU NAFSĪ WA ʾASLAMTU

our Lord, truly I have oppressed my self and I surrender

{27:44}

I have written on this subject of the Self at Peace {nafs mutmaʿinnah} in a number of other essays.

In a nutshell my own understanding is that there is no real possibility of any kind of peace unless it is peace, which by definition is a state of being which is personal, sexual, communal, political, material, intellectual, religious and spiritual, where one has finally surrendered to the degree that one is at peace at every level even, if necessary, in the midst of hand to hand combat. Allāh says,

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ ۚ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ

LAAĀ ʾIKRĀHA FĪ-D-DĪN: QAT-TABAYYANA-R-RUSHḍU MINA-L-GḥAYY

there is no coercion in religion, the truth stands clear from the false
{2:256}

I believe this that those who put themselves forward as peace makers and reconcilers of communities and nations that are in active strife with one another must themselves be at peace. It is hopeless to imagine that peace or reconciliation can come unless those who seek to bring about such peace are themselves reconciled to what and who it is they are and are at peace with their own selves. Animals cannot lead animals. Peace cannot be made any more than love can be made.

At the level of sanity, rather than hubris, there is for many of us an open door that leads to our family. In this realm we must struggle, and indeed involve ourselves in tough combat, to provide an environment that will, if nothing else, promote and sustain salāh, zakāh, sawm, and ḥajj.

رَبَّنَا لِيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ

RABBANA LI-TUQĪMŪ-Ṣ-ṢĀLĀTA

our Lord, that they may establish the ṣalāh,
{14:37}

By struggle in this instance I mean outwardly and inwardly against the entire elaborate apparatus of what is sometimes called 'the new world order', which might be also called material secularism, one world universal wage slavery in which the state as defacto 'god' denies the existence of Allāh at any level other than as a sentimental vestigial folkloric figure useful for whipping up communal agitation, resettlement, racial cleansing and brush wars {where useful} in order to make or save a buck {yen, mark, pound, ruble or whatever}. It is an order typified by dog eat dog and run for your life. If it is not clear to you what that order is then you are its agent — willingly or unwillingly.

At, perhaps, a more gross level there is the spawn of the new world order, its *product*, for sale or as a carrot or a bribe in the form of everything sublime which has been subverted, perverted, inverted, caricatured and twisted beyond only the most passing recognition. It is a plague that relentlessly seeps into one's home and one must be a true mujahid, a real wager of holy war, to carry out that struggle without a stiff fight. By Allāh the very air we breathe is poisoned by blind greed until the clothes we wear on our back are made of fire. (Q15:5) A quick look at the world reveals that which is foretold and evil has become good and what is good is almost everywhere despised.

Beyond the nuclear family there is for some of us another web of inter-relations involving aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, grandmothers and grandfathers and all of their various families, which represents another possible open door and a realm in which to act in the combat for the Truth.

As for those of us involved in a congregational religious and spiritual life, our brothers and sisters in Allāh — those with whom we remember Allāh {dhikrullāh} and enter ṣalāh and fast, are another open door, an open door that is often far more open than the door leading to our family members.

A bit wider flung is the net of inter-relationship in commerce and service. This does not fare well in a world which is often one of impersonal crossings rather than actual meetings with people. In what is left of the traditional world this realm is filled with possibility. In the world where the green grocer has been replaced by showcases of generic vegetables, the cobbler has succumbed to cheap plastic shoes and the beggar is cursed rather than blessed the possibilities are less obvious.

When one reaches this largest web it would appear a real border is reached of worlds in which one can humanly hope to relate and co-operate with others in an attempt to erase disbelief and oppression {ḍhulm}, given first and always that we have ceased to oppress our own self. That in truth that more than most of us can hope to do. May Allāh help us in our struggle {jihād}.



written by one who is poor before his Lord and endlessly enriched by His Bounty



‘Abdullāh Noorudeen Durkee

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